THEIR TO-MORROWS

A PLAY

IN FOUR SCENES

By

TACIE MAY HANNA

of

SAN BERNARDINO, CALIFORNIA

Written for the Boys Work Committee of the Rotary Club of San Bernardino, California, and successfully produced by that club before an audience of more than twelve hundred persons with the object of promoting attendance at the San Bernardino Night School

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NOTE:—This play, though written specially to promote attendance at night school, may be used with equal appropriateness to stimulate enrollment for correspondence courses in the case of towns not having night schools, by making the several changes in the original lines indicated on pages 13, 27, 32, 33 and 40.

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THEIR TO-MORROWS

THE CHARACTERS

IN THE ORDER OF THEIR APPEARANCE

Mrs. Butler.....*A sweet, earnest woman who has known much hard work*

Jack Butler.....*A bright, energetic young fellow of eighteen*

Mr. Butler.....*A gruff, hard-working man*

Margaret Rowell.....*A beautiful girl of about eighteen*

George Rowell.....*A carefree boy of sixteen, who lives for a "good time"*

Mr. Rowell..*An energetic, fairly prosperous business man in his early forties*

Mrs. Rowell.....*An attractive, motherly woman*

Miss Pearson.....*A stenographer*

Office boy.

THEIR TO-MORROWS

Scene I—*Dining room of the Butler home.*
Time—*Six-thirty on a winter's morning.*

Characters

Mrs. Butler.....*A sweet, earnest woman who has known much hard work*
Mr. Butler.....*A gruff, hard-working man*
Jack Butler.....*A bright, energetic young fellow of eighteen*

The scene is a cheaply furnished room which serves as living room and dining room. The furniture, carpets, etc., are the worse for wear. There are entrances at the Left, Right and Center, and down stage, at the Right, is a stove near which are two chairs laden with clothes, indicating that children must have undressed by the fire. In the center of the room is a table partially spread for breakfast.

A moment after the curtain rises Mrs. Butler enters from the Kitchen (C), places some dishes on the table, puts coffee-pot on stove and returns to the Kitchen. She is a thin, tired little woman who shows the result of hard work.

As the mother disappears, Jack enters from the left. He is an energetic young fellow of seventeen. He takes off his cap and the old overcoat he is wearing and throws them on the couch near the door, whistling softly the while. Then he goes over to the fire and starts to warm his hands. The mother enters with a pitcher and cups.

Mother

(*Putting things on table*)

Why, Jack, you back already?

Jack

Sure am. Some luck this time. Every kid was there to take his route. I got them off on the dot and didn't have to deliver a single paper. Gee! If it would only go like this every morning, I could get more done. I've made extra good this month as it is,—have five for you besides the fifteen for dad.

Mother

(*Who has been working at table*)

Oh, Jack, I couldn't take it. You need a new hat and—so many things!

Jack

(*Rubbing his hands to warm them*)

Never you mind about me.

Mother

Stir up the fire and you'll get warm.

Jack

Where's dad?

Mother

I haven't called him yet. He seemed so tired last night, I thought I'd let him sleep until the last minute.

Jack

(*Beaming*)

Got some news that may make even him take off his hat to me.

Mother

(*Eagerly*)

What's happened, Jack?

Jack

Oh, you'll be tickled silly, mother. I wanted to waken you when I got home from the library last night.

Mother

You don't mean that you have been chosen?

Jack

How did you guess? Well, that's it, all right. Mr. Ballinger told me last evening that I was to be one of the championship debaters. He says my scholarship record for the two and a half years of school isn't the highest by a good deal because I had such a hard time with those foreign languages. But he says I'm winning, and that report card I showed you yesterday was one of the best the old school turned out this quarter. And since my debating record is O. K., why, I'm one of the fellows to represent the school. How's that? Think dad will be impressed?

Mother

(*Hesitating*)

I—I hope so.

(*Tenderly*)

I know I'm very proud of you, dear.

Jack

Oh, yesterday was a red-letter day, all right. Something else happened that I don't mind telling you about—you always understand.

Mother

(*Interrupting*)

I must see to the breakfast, Jack—

Jack

(*Detaining her in his eagerness*)

Just one minute, mother. You know the big football game comes a week from Saturday. Well, I'm going to see that game or bust. I can arrange my Saturday job all right, and I have two comps. for ticket-selling. Our chances of winning are bully. We have a dandy bunch of rooters and they wanted me to help "Sport" Finley lead the yells, but I told them "Nothing doing," and guess why. I've asked Margaret Rowell to go with me and she's accepted. How's that?

Mother

(*Inquiringly and with lively interest*)

Margaret Rowell?

Jack

(*His enthusiasm increasing*)

Sure thing. She's the Queen of the school—a wonderful girl. We've been rivals in some of our classes for two years. She's always been pleasant to me, but—Oh, well—I couldn't get up the courage to ask her to go anywhere. You see, her brother George is a Soph this year, and already he's one of the sports, silk shirts and his dad's car, and all that sort of thing. I didn't know how she'd feel about stepping out with the janitor boy who wears patched clothes—

Mother

(*Earnestly*)

It isn't the money or clothes that make the man, my boy.

Jack

I know that, all right, mother, but we will have to agree that sometimes they fix him up pretty well. I'll make good, all right, if I once get a decent education as a foundation. By the time I get through high school, I hope I'll know how to get right down and dig things out. Then I'm going to dig my way through college if I can, and get ready for living in some big way. *(After a pause, during which the mother looks at clock in the room)*: Gee! When I think about a week from Saturday I get palpitations, sure thing. Margaret is some girl. Wonder what she'll say when she hears I'm to be one of the championship debaters!

Mother

Perhaps she'll say as I always do—that she knew you'd make good. Now hurry, dear, and get an hour's sleep. You can eat breakfast with the children.

Jack

That's right. I didn't get to bed until nearly midnight, and I pulled out before four.

(He stops at the door)

Mum's the word. I'll tell dad tonight.

(As he exits, left, mother goes to door on right; opens it)

Mother

Oh, you're up, John! I thought I'd let you sleep until breakfast was ready for you.

(Enter John Butler, Jack's father. He is rather a large man, hardworking, gruff. He wears his work clothes)

Father

Well, I'm ready for breakfast.

(Goes over to fire; looks about)

Jack back yet? I've been wanting to see him.

Mother

He's been wanting to see you, too, John. He's gone to get an hour's sleep before school—

Father

H'm. Well, I'll see him this evening. Where's breakfast?

Mother

(Starting toward kitchen)

I'll put it on.

(Turning back to cupboard in room, and taking some papers from it)

While you wait—here are the bills that came yesterday. I didn't show them to you last night—you seemed so tired.

(She puts the bills before him and hurries into the kitchen. He opens a couple without comment, then:)

Father

(Calling to her)

Mother! Sarah! How about this gas bill? Five dollars! That's highway robbery. How about it?

Mother

(Bringing in the cereal and toast)

I've been doing Mrs. Williams' washing to get money to pay for Susan's music lessons.

(During the speeches that follow the mother goes back and forth to the kitchen as the meal requires, and the father eats his breakfast)

Father

And givin' all the money you make to the gas man! I can't stand a bill like that! You'll have to cut out Susan's lessons. She plays good enough.

Mother

No, John. She's twelve and she really ought to have some lessons. She practices on Mrs. Williams' piano.

Father

I can't help that! I'm not goin' to have you doin' washin' to pay for high-falootin' ideas.

Mother

(Earnestly, as she pours coffee)

I save every way I can—we must look after our children's needs.

Father

Needs. Well, don't I? They've never starved a winter yet.

(Impatiently)

Why, you and me never had none of them music lessons, an' this an' that you're always fussin' about them havin'. What's good enough for me an' you is good enough for them. That's my preachin'.

Mother

(Truly distressed)

But father!—

Father

Look here. If we start out tryin' to give 'em these extras we'll be startin' something we can't finish. We'll make 'em discontented an' they'll be pityin' us 'cause we ain't got this an' that—look at Jack now—

Mother

But, John, don't you see—

Father

(Interrupting, as he picks up another bill)

So you took Dick to the dentist, after all?

Mother

Yes, I had to. The bill isn't large.

Father

Did his teeth ache him?

Mother

No, but they are his second teeth, and they are so very crooked.

Father

There you go again—crooked! If his teeth ache him, get 'em fixed, of course. But I don't want to hear no more talk about straightenin' crooked teeth, understand? Why, my teeth point ever' which way, an' I can't say as I mind. I'm used to 'em—they's enough of 'em that hits. You an' me an' our kids belong to the class o' people who have to take things as they find 'em in this world.

Mother

(Meekly)

Let me get you some more mush, John.

Father

(Motioning her away)

That grocery bill is twice what it used to be, but you notice I ain't kickin' on the grocery bill—even if it is highway robbery. We've gotta

eat, no matter what it costs. That's about all the pleasure I git out o' life. It's the unnecessities that I can't and won't stand for.

(After a short pause)

It ain't goin' to be so hard to meet the bills next month.

Mother

(Surprised)

You going to have a raise?

Father

A raise? Well, I guess not—unless we strike again.

Mother

(Anxiously)

Strike?

Father

Don't worry. There ain't nothin' like that in the air, worse luck. I was just remarkin' that we've had a bit o' good luck an' the bills ain't goin' to be so hard to meet.

Mother

Why?

Father

Charlie Creighton's quittin' his job—you know—that's the one Jack held down last summer while Charlie took a month off. It's an easy enough job, good pay an' short hours. I didn't have any trouble landing it for Jack. Ain't that luck for you?

Mother

(Greatly distressed)

For Jack, did you say?

Father

Sure, Jack's good an' smart. He's to begin work on Monday next.

Mother

Why, Jack's in school!

Father

Well, he can stop school. He's old enough to quit lettin' pleasure interfere with business.

Mother

(Pleading)

But Jack's not through school yet!

Father

No, he ain't through, an' he ain't never goin' to be, as I can see. I heard him talkin' about college the other day, an' what not! If he don't get down to a steady job pretty quick he won't be worth nothin'.

Mother

But, John, he's more than paid his way so far. He works mornings, after school and Saturdays.

Father

Well, he'll make four times as much at the new job. He's seventeen. He's got a whole lot more'n common school learnin'—he's got all he needs an' more.

Mother

(Surprised at her own daring)

John, you mustn't try to take Jack out of school. I thought we'd had our last argument about that.

Father

(His patience exhausted)

Who's at the head o' this house? Why is it you always make trouble whenever I begin plannin' for the children? I know what's best for that boy. Here, heat up my coffee, will you?

(He hands her his cup; she takes it and silently pours coffee from pot on stove. Suddenly the door on the left is opened and Jack rushes in.)

Mother

Why, Jack! I thought you were sleeping.

Jack

(Breezily)

I was just going off when it popped into my head that I have to be at school early this morning—the quartette practices.

Father

(With a touch of scorn)

Singin' lessons, eh?

Jack

Sure, we are getting ready for a concert.

Father

Now, I ain't no objection to your singin'. But it comes to me, ain't you wastin' your time? How much money's it goin' to bring ye?

Mother

(Earnestly)

Why, John, I've always longed to take singing lessons. Don't you see it's such a joy!

Father

I ain't denyin' it's a joy to some folks that has time for it. But is it going to bring in anything?

Jack

(Still light-hearted)

It may bring in some eggs if I try it on the public. *(Dodges the imaginary eggs.)*

Father

(Getting down to business)

I've been wantin' to see you, Jack.

Jack

And I've been wanting to see you, father.

Father

That so? Well, let's make it short.

(Looks at clock)

I've got to start to work in fifteen minutes. I'll tell ye what I got on my mind. Charlie Creighton's quittin' his job, an' I've landed it for you an' you are to start work next Monday.

Jack

(Astonished)

But father—

Father

Now that's settled. It's time you got down to business. I had to stop school in the eighth grade. We've done a whole lot better by you than my folks done by me.

Jack

(Still incredulous)

You mean I'm to stop school and take a steady job?

Father

(Shoving his chair back and rising)

That's the idea.

Jack

But, dad, listen. I'm on the championship debating team, my scholarship is getting to be No. 1.—You saw my report—The quartette—

Father

That's all very well, my boy, but life is somethin' more than arguin' and singin'. It's time you got to work. You begin on Creighton's job on Monday.

Jack

But I don't like Creighton's job.

Father

It's good pay and it's easy. Maybe you can work up to foreman or somethin'.

Jack

But I don't want to be foreman.

Father

(Giving his chair an impatient shove)

What do you want?

Jack

Why, I want to go on and finish high school and college and find my place.

Father

What place?

Jack

I—I don't know yet.

Father

(With rich scorn)

Better go to quartette practice and find out. All this time in school and you don't know what you want to do?

Jack

(Defending himself)

No, dad, not yet—that's one reason I'm in school. So far school has taught me what I don't want to do.

Father

(Turning to mother, who has been listening, greatly distressed)

Didn't I tell ye? It makes 'em discontented.

(To Jack)

Look here, it's time somebody learned you a job.

Jack

I'm learning a job, all right—the job of making the most out of my life. At present I'm building a big, strong foundation upon which to rear an edifice that will mean something to the world and do justice to myself—that's the way our principal talks.

Father

You mean you're goin' to be a carpenter or a mason?

Jack

No. don't you see? I—well, I didn't mean it just exactly as it sounded.

Father

(Turning toward the door in disgust)

Oh, goin' to be a poet, eh? Well, I gotta be goin.' Tell 'em at school today that you're goin' to quit this week.

Mother

John, please don't. He won't like that job.

Father

(Disgusted)

Like that job? Who's talkin' about likin' a job? Do you think I like to pound rivets all day for 300 days in the year? Like it?

(He puts on his hat and starts for door)

You begin work on Monday, Jack.

Jack

(Jumping up and facing him)

Father, I won't do it.

Father

What?

Jack

I won't give up my future. I won't stop school.

Father

(Angry)

You tell me you won't?

Jack

You force me to do so.

Father

Who's took care of you all these years? Who's pounded rivets to keep you clothed and fed? Don't you owe me nothin'?

Jack

I don't owe you my future.

Father

You're my son. You owe **your life** to me an' your mother. It's time you paid some of your debts.

Jack

I'm going to if you'll let me spend a little more time learning how best to do it.

Father

(With his hand on the door, left)

You do your learnin' in the shop. YOU GO TO WORK ON MONDAY!

(He exits)

Jack

(Calling after him)

I won't. I'll leave home first.

Mother

(Greatly distressed)

Jack!

Jack

Mother, I can't give up my future. I'm only an average fellow. It's the average fellow who must have an education if he hopes to get anywhere. I wish I were smarter, but I'm determined to make the most out of my life. Up at school I caught the vision of the bigger life. I can't spend my life pounding rivets like father.

Mother

Don't be too hard on your father. He has pounded rivets for those he loved—for you children and me. He doesn't know anything else.

Jack

And so he doesn't want me to know anything else. I hate to leave you mother, but—

Mother

(Quickly)

You mustn't go, Jack. For the sake of the other children you must stay and do as your father asks. If you go, he'll put Dickie on a job the first chance he gets. He'll make Dickie pay for it, don't you see?

Jack

(Sinking into a chair and covering his face with his hands)

That'd be like him, all right.

Mother

(Going to him)

Don't, Jack. Your splendid ambition will find some way out.

Jack

(Hopelessly)

That's all right, mother. But what can a fellow hope for now-a-days without an education!

Mother

(With a sudden idea)

(1*) Why, Jack, why can't you go to night school?

Jack

(2*) Night school?

Mother

(Growing excited)

(3*) Yes, you know I went there to take Millinery last winter—there were crowds of young men in some of the buildings.

Jack

(4*) Night school! Why, I could do that, couldn't I?

Mother

It would be slow, hard work compared to day school, but you could do it.

Jack

(Growing interested as the idea unfolds)

Yes—I could! Why, sure! I know some fellows right now who are getting their education after dark.

Mother

(5*) Why, Jack! Night school is for people just like you—people who won't let poverty or anything else keep them from an education.

**Indicates change in lines to be made in towns which have no night schools.*

1*—Why, Jack, why can't you take some correspondence courses?

2*—Correspondence courses?

3*—Yes, you know how convincingly the schools advertise as to their ability to help young men fit themselves for better things.

4*—Yes, I could do that, couldn't I?

5*—Why, Jack, correspondence schools are for people, etc.

Jack

(Enthusiastically)

By George! It's for the people who are in dead earnest. It makes me think of that quotation we had in English class:

"The heights of great men, reached and kept,
Were not obtained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night."

Mother

Yes, my dear boy, you can toil upward in the night until you reach the heights of great men.

Jack

(Earnestly)

I can do my best, anyway, and never be a quitter.

Mother

(Putting her arm upon his shoulder)

I shall be prouder of you than ever, for struggle gives strength.

Jack

(Thoughtfully)

I'll let the people at school think I'm tired of school.

Mother

Oh, no, you mustn't.

Jack

When I tell them I'm going to quit school, some of the boys will say, "Tired of the grind, Jack?" and I'll just put on that superior air and a bit of a swagger, and I'll say: "Oh, there's pretty good money in the job." Then some of the kids who can't look ahead will look doleful and say: "Gee, I wish I could quit. How'd you get your dad to let you?"

Mother

But, Jack, what makes you?

Jack

I'd rather the whole crowd would think that of me than know the truth—that my dad thought I knew enough and called a halt.

Mother

Your father doesn't understand. He lives in the present—he hasn't learned to plan for the future.

Jack

(In consternation, after a pause)

Oh, Gosh!

Mother

What is it, Jack?

Jack

How do you go about it to break a date with a girl?

THEIR TO-MORROWS

Scene II—*Dining room of the Rowell home.*

Time—*Seven-thirty o'clock on the morning following Scene I.*

Characters

Mr. Rowell.....*An energetic, fairly prosperous business man in the forties*
Mrs. Rowell, *his wife*.....*An attractive, motherly woman*
Margaret, *their daughter*.....*A beautiful girl of about eighteen*
George, *their son*.....*A care-free boy of sixteen, who lives for a good time*

The scene is a dining room, attractively but not elegantly furnished. There are doors at the Center, Left and Right.

As the curtain rises, Margaret is setting the table for breakfast. A moment later the door at the center opens cautiously and George's head appears. He is a lad of sixteen, already quite the type of a "sport."

George

(Looking around the room)

Dad up yet?

Margaret

(Surprised to see him)

Why, George, what are you doing up so early? It's only seven-thirty.

George

(Entering)

Don't rub it in, now, Maggie.

(Wheedling)

I want to see you before breakfast. You can help me fix it up with dad.

Margaret

Fix up what? Your slipping out with the car last night after he told you to stay in?

George

(Nervously)

Soft-pedal that, will you? Dad isn't wise to that stunt, yet. He is getting too tight. A fellow's got to have a good time.

Margaret

(In a tone which shows she is losing patience with this younger brother)

Good time? That's about all you do have. Wait until father sees your report.

George

(Beginning to coax again)

That's what I want you to help me with. I'm not so much afraid of mother, but—well, can't you think of some way I could get by without showing it to His Majesty?

Margaret

(Putting down the plates she has taken from the china cupboard and looking at him)

Why should I? I'm losing patience with you. It's time father realized just the sort of high school work you are doing.

George

Gee, sis—don't crab. Come through like a good sport and I'll see that you get a bid to the swell house-party and dance we're going to

give the last of the month. Some swell crowd—a bunch of gay little girls—

Margaret

(With dignity)

My dear brother! I do not need your help when it comes to bids. Besides, I do not care for that gay, silly crowd you insist upon going around with.

(Earnestly)

I wish you wouldn't, George. You're too young.

George

(Indignant)

I suppose you'd like to have me chum with some kid like Jack Butler.

(Scornfully)

Help him sweep the halls at school, and then have the rare excitement of spending the evening with him at the library.

Margaret

You might do worse.

George

(With an elaborate gesture)

Not for mine. I'm a live wire, I am.

(With a sudden thought)

Oh, say, I heard something about Jack Butler last night—I heard some little thing, take it from me.

Margaret

(Interested)

What was it?

George

Oh, that's all right. I'll spring it when the time comes.

(After a pause)

Here's just a hint—he's not as crazy to be a walking encyclopedia as you thought, old girl.

Margaret

I'd like to know what you mean.

George

I know you would, but I'm too busy just at present.

(Taking his report card out of his pocket and holding it toward her)

Say, can't you take my report and chuck it for me, and then tell dad about how you lost it—you know what I want: He'll take that from you.

Margaret

(Reproachfully)

Why, George Rowell!

George

(Presenting another plan)

Well, then, when I tell dad and mother that there's a bum lot of teachers at the high school and a fellow simply can't please 'em, why you come in strong on the amens. Get me?

Margaret

I manage to please them—all my grades are good.

George

Sure—that's just what I'm sayin'—you're a "pet."

(After a pause, during which Margaret resumes her work of setting the table)

So you won't help a fellow! Well, I guess you like a scene, don't you?

Margaret

(Carelessly)

I can't say that I do.

George

You'll get your money's worth at the table this morning when dad asks for that report and little Willie hands it over. I'd never come through and show it, only if I don't he'll call up the prof and get the glad tidings first hand.

Margaret

It will be wiser to tell father the truth and take the consequences.

George

(Quickly)

I won't take too much from him, you can put that in your pipe and smoke it.

(With a swagger)

I've got a card of another kind up my sleeve.

Margaret

(Startled by his manner)

Please, George, don't talk that way. Father would do anything for you. All he is doing is insisting that you make good.

George

(Rebelliously)

Going to make me, eh?

Margaret

(Listening)

He's coming, now.

(Putting her arm upon his shoulder)

Please, George—

(Enter the father, at center. He looks his part—that of an energetic, fairly prosperous business man in the forties. He has a kindly face. Much of his trouble with George lies in the fact that he is inclined to be over-indulgent)

Father

(Speaking cheerily as he enters with morning paper)

Well, how's everyone this morning? I'm afraid I'm late, Margaret.

(Turning to George as he looks at his watch)

Isn't this early for you, George, my boy?

George

(Obviously nervous in the presence of his father)

Oh, I dunno.

(Looking about)

Where's mother, anyway?

Margaret

She's doing some baking before breakfast and frying the cakes. I'll tell her the entire family has assembled.

(She exits R.)

Father

(Breaking the awkward silence which follows Margaret's departure)

George, my boy, I'm afraid I seemed harsh last night when I refused you the car.

George

(Sullenly)

Oh, I'm used to it.

Father

(Kindly)

Don't speak that way, son. It's your welfare I have in mind. I'm so anxious that you shall get on that sometimes I seem a little stern.

George

(Emphatically)

I'll say so.

Father

I'm glad to have you use the car, but when it comes to joy rides with the boys and girls several times a week on school nights, it's all wrong.

George

(Making the most of an abused air)

Oh, I guess you never were young. Some men are that way.

(He takes his knife from his pocket and pretends to be sharpening his pencil during his father's speeches that follow)

Father

Well, it is a long time since I was quite as young as you are, my boy. When I was sixteen I had to stop school and go to work. It broke me all up.

(With a slight sigh)

I guess I'm what you call a self-made man—and not made very well as a result. I had to struggle for what education I got. I'd give anything if I'd had the chances you have, my boy. You shall have a college education—nothing shall stand in the way of your having an ample preparation for this great game of life.

George

(Looking up)

First time I ever heard you call it a game.

Father

And perhaps I shouldn't now, for it's mighty serious business, this holding your own among your fellows, this bringing to them the best you have and taking the best they have to offer you. A man needs a good, broad education as a foundation. Mind you, I don't object to your little innocent good times, but I'm enough older than you to know when you are starting on the dangerous road that leads to ruin.

George

(Who has a hearty dislike for dad's "preaching," moves nervously, looks at watch)

I wonder what's the matter with the cakes for breakfast. Shall I go and see?

Father

(Closing the little interview with a sigh as he picks up his paper)

Tell Margaret not to forget the honey for me.

(George starts for the door R. as his mother enters. She is an attractive, motherly woman. She wears a house dress. She brings in the cakes)

Mother

Good morning, my son. Mother didn't expect to see you up so early.

George

It isn't so early, mother.

Mother

Early for you.

(Calling into kitchen)

Come, Margaret.

Father, do put down that paper. This is the first morning in a long while when we all could have a nice little breakfast together.

(Margaret enters with coffee)

Father

Don't forget my honey, Maggie.

Margaret

(Laughing)

It's on the table, Father. Don't you see?

(They seat themselves at table, Mother R., Geo. L., Father C., facing audience. Margaret C. R., back to audience)

Father

George, here, thinks I was a little hard on him last night in not letting him have the car—but you see the good effects of staying in and getting to bed early—he's up bright as can be this morning.

Mother

(Surprised)

But you didn't stay in last evening, George, you—

George

(Hurriedly)

I've got to go to the library once in a while to look up school work. It's the first of the third quarter and they're starting in on a lot of new stuff.

Father

(Greatly interested at once)

First of the quarter! That's right, son. How about your card. Maggie showed us her's yesterday. I'll wager it was the best one turned out, eh, Maggie?

Margaret

I'm not sure it was the best. Jack Butler is sometimes ahead of me in two subjects.

Father

He's that debater, isn't he?

George

(Emphatically)

And janitor, isn't he?

Margaret

(Turning to George with almost amusing dignity)

You are entirely correct.

Father

Now about your card, son?

(To Mother)

He's been getting on a good deal better lately.

Margaret

(Rising and starting with plate for kitchen)

Who said so?

Father

George told me the other day when he broached the subject of that house-party.

George

(Fumbling in his pockets)

I'll bet that card is in my other suit, or I've lost it.

Margaret

(Who really is ashamed to do such a thing, but feels she must)

No, it isn't. Don't you remember you showed it to me a few minutes ago?

George

(Looking angrily at her)

Did I? Oh, so I did. Well, I'll search through my pockets and get it after breakfast.

(Margaret exits R. into kitchen)

Father

What's the matter with getting it now?

George

(Exasperated)

Well, just because mother said something about a nice little breakfast and I think we might consider her wishes.

Father

Oh, I guess it won't spoil our breakfast. Come on!

(Holds out his hand)

George

(After he has taken several articles from his pocket)

There, if you must have it.

Mother

(Reprovingly)

George, do not speak disrespectfully to your father.

George

Well, if you folks don't stop pestering me and trying to run my affairs I—I—I don't know what I'll do—I mean I DO know what I'll do.

Father

(Growing stern as he looks at card)

So that's the work you've been doing?

George

I never seen such a bum lot of teachers. They've got it in for me. You can ask any of the fellows—

Father

What have they got it in for you for? Because you won't study? Because you won't try?

George

(Hotly)

Because I'm not one of their pets—because I'm too busy to hang around and sharpen their pencils and laugh at their jokes—that's the reason. And it's straight goods I'm giving you, ask any of the fellows. There's nothing worth learning there, anyway—a lot of foolishness.

Father

That will do. I've heard all that before. My son, I'm surprised. I thought you really were trying to make good. This card is a disgrace. I'm about to do something that grieves me very much—

George

(Sullenly)

Then don't do it.

Father

(Ignoring the interruption)

Something that is very hard for me to do, but you are my only son and YOU ARE GOING TO HAVE AN EDUCATION! A GOOD EDUCATION, if I have to take you to and from school myself.

Mother

(Warningly)

Don't be too severe, Ed.

(Margaret returns and stands listening)

Father

Too severe? Look at that card.

(He hands it over to her)

Now, my gay young fellow, I've plead with you, I've bribed you, I've humored you in order to get you to try, but beginning to-day, you—

George

(Threateningly)

Be careful what you say, father.

Father

I say that beginning to-day you don't leave this house on a school night—you cut out all dances and girls, except Fridays and Saturdays, and you don't touch the auto—and I cut your trim little allowance to half. Understand? Then we'll see what kind of a card you bring in next quarter, and if—

George

(Very indignant)

Father, I won't be treated this way.

Father

What way? There never was a boy who had a father and mother more willingly to do for him. You've been spoiled, young man, you're postively sickening, my sweet sixteen. You get to work and make good at school if you know what's healthy for you.

George

And you say I can't have the car or go out for a good time—or have but half of my allowance?

Father

Not until your record at school warrants it.

George

(Rising with climactic effect)

Then let me tell you I'll stop your old school!

Father

(Astonished)

What?

George

That's what I said. I'll be seventeen next week. I can stop school at seventeen. I'll stop your old school. I know where I can get a good job—a snap with good pay.

Father

(Rising)

Stop school? You'll do nothing of the kind.

George

I guess I will, all right. I'm not the only fellow who's getting tired of it. Your Jack Butler, you brag so much about, sis, well, he's going to quit and take a job. If he does, I guess I can.

(Father steps right. Mother goes to him and, referring to card, urges him in pantomime to deal carefully with the boy)

Margaret

(Steps to left near George)

(Surprised)

Jack Butler going to stop school?

George

Sure thing! Guess he's sick of the grind.

Margaret

Why, it can't be true!

George

I just told you it IS true.

Margaret

Now I understand why he can't go to the big game. Well, I'm sure that he has been compelled to stop.

George

That isn't the way he put it, not by a long shot. He said, "There's good money in the job, and I like to make money, all right,"—that's what he said.

Margaret

But he was doing so well—was so ambitious!

George

Sure, he's ambitious. That's why he's getting to work. I've wanted to do it for months. I just stuck by school because I thought you folks wanted me to, but if you can't be decent to me, why I don't plug along at that old high school joint when I can be making my own money and spending it for my own good time and getting something real out of life.

Mother

(Coming left to George)

(Grieved)

George, you don't mean it!

George

Oh, it's nothing new to me—I've thought a lot about it when the teachers got fresh about my lessons. Who cares about a lot of people who are dead, or what "X" equals, or "The Lady of the Lake," or who wants to stand up before the kids on a hot afternoon and argue back and forth on some fool question as if you really cared who owned the coal mines. I'm sick of the whole business.

Father

(Emphatically, as he steps toward table and George)

That will do.

George

(Sitting down)

It's all right for you to be crazy over it, father. I notice you stopped school at sixteen and you've made enough money to satisfy me.

Father

I've done fairly well, financially, yes. But it's been up-hill work; and in the to-morrows it is going to be harder than ever for the young men who haven't sufficient preparation. I'd have been way yonder if I'd had the education I need—my advancement is checked right now.

But, laying aside the money, my boy—I'm leading so much narrower a life because my school days were shortened. I feel that my capacity for enjoyment is so much less.

George

(With the suggestion of a sneer)

Enjoyment! That's good.

Father

My boy, I'm shocked to know that after all I've said, you should take your schooling so lightly. I haven't any say as to what Jack Butler does. I have this to say to you: You are not of age—you are going to school every day if I have to go with you and sit in the same seat with you. Do you understand?

George

(Very angry)

You can't force me.

Father

(Quickly)

Can't I? We will see.

George

All right, we will see.

(He starts for door L.)

Father

(Hurriedly)

No, you don't! You go to your own room.

(Points to door C.)

And think this thing over. Then we'll decide whether you are going to school by yourself or with me.

George

Just you wait!

(He swings out of the room and slams the door)

Mother

(Anxiously)

Ed, my dear, you've taken the wrong way with the boy. Don't you see that you can't drive him to school?

Father

(Decisively, as he paces floor in his agitation)

I insist that he make good.

Mother

Yes, but there is just one person in the world who can make him make good, and that is himself.

Father

(Thoughtfully)

You're right. I'm helpless there.

(Emphatically)

But I can keep him at it.

Margaret

You cannot make him learn, father. In his present attitude he just wastes his time and is a regular nuisance at school.

Father

(Pacing floor)

Then what can I do?

Mother

(Helplessly)

We must be careful.

Father

(Emphatically)

Do you expect me to stand calmly by while that foolish boy makes the mistake of his life? If I permit it, he will blame me in future years; I never knew it to fail.

Mother

(Trying to calm him)

I really believe, Ed, that if he could get a good, hard job—get out in the world and see what it means to be struggling on with insufficient preparation—

Father

(As he paces back and forth)

No, no, it wouldn't do.

Mother

You interrupted me,—I say that then he might have the will to go back to school.

Father

And, again, don't you see, he might get the spendthrift habit and—

Mother

(Giving up)

Well, what shall we do?

Father

I'll—I'll bribe him to stay in school. Perhaps I was too severe. I'll bribe him.

(To Margaret)

Go and tell him to come here.

(Margaret exits)

Mother

You don't think it would be better to let him try the steady job?

Father

No; he needs the influence of the school. Some day, when we least expect it, he may begin to see the practical value of an education. Who knows? Let us hope!

Margaret

(Rushing in hurriedly with a piece of wrapping paper in her hand)

He isn't there. This was on his bed.

(She hands note to mother)

Mother

Gone!

Father

Read it, mother.

Mother

(Reading)

"I'm for fair play. Father left school at sixteen; Jack Butler's quit. So can I."

(The father and mother have nothing to say. They are too deeply grieved)

Margaret

(Sadly)

And to think that Jack Butler is to blame!

Quick Curtain

(Note—The close of this act must be played with feeling, but care must be taken to keep it sincere and avoid any unnatural melodramatic effects.)

THEIR TO-MORROWS

Scene 3—*Library of the Rowell home*
Time—*New Year's Eve, three years after Scene 2*

Characters

Margaret, Jack and George

The scene is the library in the Rowell home. Down stage at Right is a table upon which is the phone. Down stage at Left is a davenport. Other furniture to make an attractive room. The entrance is up stage at Left.

The curtain rises on an empty stage. The phone rings. Then Margaret, in an attractive evening gown, enters hurriedly and goes to phone.

Margaret

(At phone)

Hello, Central . . . were you calling 72317 *(use a nonexistent number of local style)* . . . Yes—very well . . . Hello . . . Helen? Yes. . . Oh, I'm so sorry you couldn't come. . . Yes, just an informal party to watch the Old Year out. Louise Turner and I are giving it. We were great friends when we graduated from high school. I wanted you to meet her. . . George? Yes, he's here with an approved number of his friends, so you can imagine the combination. . . . Remember, that's the last train that will get us to the campus on time. . . . I'll call you tomorrow. Good-bye.

(As she hangs up the receiver and starts for the door, Jack enters. He is well dressed in a dark suit)

Jack

I beg your pardon. . . Are you in a hurry?

Margaret

(Pleasantly enough, as she recovers from her surprise at his sudden entrance)

Well, rather. Why?

Jack

(Hurriedly)

I heard the phone. I saw you come in here. I followed. It seemed to me that I couldn't go away this evening without telling you how deeply grateful I am for this invitation.

Margaret

(Suddenly rather distant)

Oh, you must thank Louise for that.

Jack

(Disappointed)

Thank Louise? Then you didn't invite me?

Margaret

No.

Jack

If I had known that, I shouldn't have come.

Margaret

Oh, that is all right. You are quite welcome, I am sure.

Jack

(Determined to make the most of this opportunity)

This is the first opportunity I've had to speak to you since that

morning, three years ago, when I told you I couldn't go to the game, do you remember? *(She nods.)* Your friendship meant a great deal to me in those days. I've never ceased to be interested in your career. I know the brilliant record you are making in college. I congratulate you.

Margaret

(Still distant)

Thank you. I wish I could congratulate you upon a college record.

(She makes a move toward the door)

Jack

(Quickly)

I wish that you could.

Margaret

So you've come to see your mistake?

Jack

(Questioningly)

My mistake?

Margaret

Yes, your mistake in giving up your education for the sake of a job and some ready money.

Jack

(As he grasps her meaning)

I am sorry that I did not graduate from high school.

Margaret

Well, I'm surprised and glad to hear you make the confession. You were such a good worker I thought it was a great pity that you could not look ahead.

Jack

I am glad that you were interested enough to care.

Margaret

(With spirit)

I certainly had reason to care. You were the cause of George's stopping school.

Jack

(Incredulous)

What do you say?

Margaret

He had been wanting to stop for some time but father had kept him at it, hoping he'd begin to see the practical value of an education. But when he heard that you had given up your schooling for a so-called "good job," there was no holding him.

Jack

(Thoroughly surprised)

Why, I didn't know that I had anything to do with it.

Margaret

That's often the way in this world. You always were a leader at school and supposed to be pretty level-headed. George pretended to scorn you because you were not "sporty" but you see he DID follow you.

Jack

(Genuinely distressed)

What a mistake!

Margaret

(Quite coolly)

I'm glad you feel that way about it, but it is too late.

Jack

Why too late?

Margaret

He ran away from home in order to escape school. Then we persuaded him to come home with the understanding that we'd never compel him to go to school. It would have been useless to make him, anyway.

Jack

And he never went back to high school?

Margaret

No. So far he's been perfectly satisfied. He's making fairly good money, and he has a little roadster and a jolly group of friends and he thinks that's all there is to life. You are of the same opinion, I suppose.

Jack

(Quickly)

*Well, hardly. I haven't missed but two weeks of night school since I stopped day school. It's slow, but sure. I hope to enter college in a couple of years more.

Margaret

(With surprise and delight)

You? Then you are **not** satisfied with what you know?

Jack

Not by a good deal!

Margaret

Now I am sure of what I **felt** at the first. You stopped school because you were compelled to.

(As she grows more cordial)

Why didn't you tell us so?

Jack

There was a reason, but never mind about that. You know the truth now.

Margaret

(Impulsively)

I wish we could arrange for you to have a little talk with George this evening.

Jack

Why, what about?

Margaret

I wish you'd tell him how you feel about school. Father's just breaking his heart over the way George does. Will you do it, please?

Jack

(Hesitatingly)

It is rather trying to corner another fellow and preach to him against his will. But I guess I'm equal to it this time. I feel sort of responsible for his mistake.

Margaret

Thank you so much. You stay in here and I'll send him in after—No, I'll pretend I heard the phone and send him in to answer it. Then you talk to him. Now I must go.

(She offers her hand)

**Indicates change in lines to be made in towns which have no night schools.*

*Well, hardly. I haven't missed a school night on some correspondence courses I am taking since I stopped high school. It's slow, but sure.

Jack

(Gratefully, as he shakes her hand)

I am very glad that we had this little visit.

Margaret

(Cordially)

I can't tell you how glad I am. I see that you are going to make good, just as we used to prophesy for you in high school. You see, I thought you'd—well, flattened out, as we sometimes say—and I couldn't forgive you. You're—

(She hesitates, then continues with sincerity)

I am going to tell you just what I think of you—you're ever so much stronger and finer than you were in those days—

Jack

(Pleased, but embarrassed)

Please don't—

Margaret

And I know why: struggle gives strength and develops character. I can see you've had a struggle and I admire you for it. I'm sorry I misjudged you.

Jack

(Deeply appreciative)

We never can be scholarship rivals again—you are so far ahead of me—but I hope we may be good friends again.

Margaret

(Smiling)

Why, we are. I'm glad Louise put your name on the invitation list.

Jack

Thank you. We are going to dance the Old Year out, are we not?

Margaret

Yes, dancing begins after the musicale.

Jack

May I have the first dance of the New Year?

Margaret

(Smilingly)

You may.

(Hurrying to door)

Now I'll send George to you. I think I know where he is.

(She disappears and immediately reappears to say:)

I just want to say this: Even if you never get the diploma from high school or college, you're going to be a worth-while man. I can see it. You are going to be an educated man some bright To-Morrow **because you have the will to be.** There is always a way.

(She goes. Jack stands, looking after her. He is very happy. He hurries to the couch and seats himself as George enters. George is still the gay young fellow of Scene 2. He looks handsome in a dress suit. He hurries to phone)

George

Hello! Hello! . . . Oh, thunder!

(He slams up receiver and starts out)

Jack

(Rising and getting between George and the door)

Hello there, George!

George

(Shaking hands pleasantly)

What you doing in here? Haven't seen you in ages until tonight. Everything going O. K.?

(Without waiting for an answer he makes a move to the door)

Jack

(Quickly)

Nobody on the phone?

George

No answer!

Jack

If it was Long Distance it will ring again in a minute.

George

(Moving reluctantly back toward phone)

It'd better speed up. I can't spend my evening in here.

Jack

I'm mighty glad that this happened just this way. While you wait, I want to make a little proposition to you. It will take only a minute.

George

(Surprised)

To me? What about?

Jack

It's something that may mean a whole lot to you if you have the good judgment to go in for it.

George

Some get-rich-quick scheme, eh? Are you an oil promotor? Fire ahead.

Jack

It's something to help you out in the job you're holding.

George

(Losing interest)

Oh, I'm all right. My job's good and easy.

Jack

Any future to it?

George

Oh, I dunno. I've been promoted once.

Jack

What are you aiming for?

George

Aiming for? What do you mean?

Jack

What are your plans for the future, if I may ask? . . . And I have a reason for asking.

George

(Breezily)

Well, soon's I get my roadster paid for, I'm going to turn it in toward a big touring car. A fellow can't make the right sort of an impression nowadays unless he has a pretty good lay-out, especially if he breezes around with a good smart crowd. Keeps me pretty much in debt, but I guess I can make the grade.

Jack

So that's your plan for the future?

George

That's my big plan. Can't handle too much all at once. Why? What are you after?

Jack

Like your job?

George

Like it? Like it, did you say? No, I don't like it. But there isn't much to it. . . It don't take much out of me. I got to do something to get the money. Dad won't do anything for me unless I go back to school. You know he still keeps after me. Can't seem to see that I wouldn't have one-tenth the money to jingle if I was still plodding along there. Why, I'd only just be graduating this year!

Jack

Look here, that's what I want to talk to you about—**school.**

George

School! Well, I never thought that of you! You quit!

Jack

Because I had to. I didn't tell you fellows at the time—I didn't want you to know that my father made me stop.

George

Your father?

(With a whistle)

Well, he's no relation to my dad, that's a cinch.

Jack

It has come to my ears that that had something to do with your stopping school.

George

I figured that if you could step out, I could, too. But don't take the credit. I'd probably have got up the pep to do it, anyway.

Jack

Now you see why I'm preaching. It's come over me that because I gave the wrong impression, I'm sort of responsible for you.

George

Responsible for me? What are you driving at?

Jack

Well, I've been driving at something besides rivets since I stopped school. Here's one of the thoughts I've been driving into my head: In five or six years I'm going to be competing with all the fellows my own age who were far-sighted enough to get a college education. Life is essentially competitive, we all know that. Well, plain horse-sense tells me I don't care to start the race with any such handicap. Get me?

George

(Refusing to be serious)

Hope you don't think that talk's new to me? I took it in with my Mellin's food. Grew up on it, my friend. I'm positively immune.

Jack

Nowadays a fellow must do some long scheming if he doesn't want to get left. Right?

George

(To avoid a serious answer)

Left, right, left. Forward, MARCH.

(He gives this with quite the army command)

Jack

(Quickly)

Yes, and the question is how far are you going to be able to march?

George

(Easily)

Oh, I'm all right. There isn't a fellow my age who has an easier job or a snappier little car than I have . . . or a better time, by Jinks!

Jack

Can't you see my point? Hundreds of young fellows are denying themselves a good many immediate pleasures because they have a vision of the future. YOU are speeding up a little hill, and that's as far as you are going to be able to go. THEY are preparing for the long, hard pull that may bring them to the mountain top.

George

Say, look here! You sound just like my dad!

Jack

I'll tell you why you don't appreciate an education—it's because the way has been made too easy for you.

George

(A little riled)

Just who gave you permission to light into me?

Jack

I know all this advice comes unsolicited on your part. I take the liberty because—

George

(Quickly)

Liberty is right. "Sweet land of liberty." I've gotta go.

(He again moves toward door)

Jack

(Determined to detain him a few minutes longer)

One minute! That proposition!

George

(With a gesture of dismissal)

No, thank you.

Jack

(Taking out his watch)

The sermon will be concluded in three minutes or you can call a halt. I know you're a good-natured chap and will hear me through.

George

(Waiting reluctantly)

Well, make it snappy. Don't know but I'd as soon let you talk at me as to have to see that enormous Miss—What's-her-name—try to sing.

(Listening)

I think Sis has just got her started. After this ordeal the dancing begins. I've got a little Queen—Rose La Mar—ever see her?

(Glowing as he describes her)

Baby blue eyes, fluffy yellow hair! Oh, my young friend!

Jack

(Coming to the point with rather startling abruptness)

How would you like to take a correspondence course with me?

George

(Pretending to be overcome)

Help! What do you take me for?

Jack

(*1) I'd help you with it. We'd work together. Or night school? I've been at it for two years. Great stuff. Now, there's a vocational class—

George

(*2) Night school? Why, I have all my fun breezing around at night.

Jack

(*3) This class in vocational education is mighty interesting. It helps a fellow to decide what his life work should be.

George

Life work? You sound like a missionary.

Jack

(Unmindful of the interruption)

Nowadays a man must find the work for which he is best fitted and specialize in that—after he's had something of a general education —or the chances are that he is out of the race. You say you don't like your job.

George

I ain't kicking. It ain't hard.

Jack

Listen. You're all wrong. I've been thinking this thing out. You SHOULD like it, and it should require the very best that you have to give. A man must love his job and put his life into it if he hopes to win.

George

Slush! Tell that to the canary.

Jack

It's straight goods.

George

Love your job?

Jack

When I began on a regular job three years ago, I hated the whole business, and that is why I started in night school. I was determined to get out of it all, some way. At first I didn't get the connection between an education and that kind of a job. Gradually I came to see that as a fellow grows he can make his life grow with him. There are all kinds

---

**Indicates change in lines to be made in towns which have no night schools.*

*1. I'd help you with it. We'd work together. I've been at it for two years. Great stuff!

*2. Study at night! Why, that's when I have all my fun breezing around.

*3. The courses in Factory Management and Salesmanship are mighty interesting and will help a fellow to decide what his life work should be.

of chances for the laboring man with some gray matter in his top floor.
(Indicates his head)

And the good sense to keep it fed up and growing. At present I'm going to night school, not to get **out** of the job I hold, but to develop the power to get **into** it. Great stuff! If I have a better understanding, a wider vision than any of the fellows I compete with, and put all that right into the work I'm doing, what do you suppose is going to happen to Jack Butler and his daily task? I'll tell you, it's a paying proposition in more ways than one—this self-investment.

(Jack pauses; George begins to whistle softly. Jack continues:)

If you don't know the joy of doing your best and struggling to make it better, you don't know anything about the fun of being alive. I wish you'd go back to high school or—

George

(Horrified at the idea)

Go back to high school after three years? Go back with those kids?

Jack

Any number of earnest fellows do it after they see their mistake. Some of them are the leaders at the school right now.

George

No; you're talking to the wrong man. I never was good in school work. I didn't like it.

Jack

Let's look at this squarely. You didn't like it because you didn't master your lessons—they mastered you. You didn't know how to study—you couldn't concentrate. Concentration is one of the essentials for success in life—any business man will tell you so. Don't you see—you are the last fellow who should leave school?

George

(Moving about restlessly)

Don't get so worked up. You make me nervous.

Jack

(Still very earnest)

*Go to night school with me!

George

What next?

Jack

It is my notion that we must learn how to think straight and how to appreciate life before we are going to be able to recognize our big chance when it comes.

George

(Impatiently)

Would you mind telling me what makes you pick on me like one of those big brothers?

(Pointedly)

Is it because you are still sort of struck with Maggie?

Jack

(Angrily)

Leave your sister out of this, will you?

**Indicates change in lines to be made in towns which have no night schools.*

*Take up some evening study with me!

George

(With equal spirit)

I'll do as I please about my own sister. Understand?

Jack

(Calming down)

I beg your pardon—I was hasty. I regard your sister as the finest girl I have ever met.

George

Yes, I know—

(Breezily, pointing as if at headlines)

Struggles of ambitious young man win charming maid! Beautiful!

(Squinting an eye)

Why, I can see it with one eye closed.

Jack

(Again growing angry)

I ask you to stop that sort of talk. I can aspire only to her friendship.

George

Oh, I dunno. Maggie'd be struck with the kind of dope you've been handing out this evening.

Jack

Call it dope if you want to. When it's too late you'll find that I am right.

George

(Turning suddenly to him)

I'll bet that if you practice what you preach, in five years I can cash in for more money than you can—and a heap more good times.

Jack

Five years? Perhaps so. But you come around in **twenty** years and let's see how we stack up.

George

Twenty years?

(Then, with an elaborate bow)

Very well—we strive to please—twenty years it is!

(The dance music is heard. George starts with:)

I'm off—there's the music. See you later.

(At the door he calls back jokingly:)

Oh, you little life saver!

(Jack is following him slowly as—)

CURTAIN

THEIR TO-MORROWS

Scene 4—*Jack Butler's office*

Time—*About 10 A. M. December 31st, twenty years after Scene 3*

Characters

Jack
Margaret
George
Miss Pearson, a stenographer
An office boy

The scene is Jack's private office, up-to-date and prosperous in appearance. There are doors Left, Center and Right. Desk is down stage. Chairs and other furniture, as required.

As the curtain rises, Jack is at his desk. He looks somewhat older—his hair is slightly gray about the temples. Near him sits his stenographer, to whom he is dictating.

Jack

(Finishing the letter)

Your wishes regarding this matter will be given prompt attention. Very truly yours. Get both letters in the morning mail, Miss Pearson. Now for our reply to Cary and Sons—

(The door C. opens and the office boy enters)

Boy

(Handing card to Jack)

Gentleman waiting to see you—said he had an appointment.

Jack

Show him to the upstairs office—he can get my orders there.

Boy

Yes, sir.

(He exits)

Jack

Now, Miss Pearson—Cary and Sons: Thank you for your order of the 10th. It will receive my personal attention as to the points mentioned and though we are unusually busy just now, I anticipate being able to make shipment by the 20th as you request.

(The telephone rings)

Hello . . . yes . . . yes. Well, I'll have to look that up and call you later. Good-bye.

(Hangs up receiver; makes memorandum as he turns to Miss Pearson)

Now then—

(The door at R. opens and Margaret enters. She is in handsome street costume. Her hair is slightly gray. She is quite as attractive as when we last saw her)

Margaret

Busy, Jack? Good morning, Miss Pearson.

Miss Pearson

(Rising)

Good morning, Mrs. Butler.

Jack

(Surprised to see her)

Why, Margaret! What brought you here? Anything wrong at home?

Margaret

No, Jack—it's about—I only want a minute of your time. I can wait if you are busy. I slipped in by the private entrance.

(Starting for door)

I can slip out again until you can see me.

Jack

No.

(To stenographer)

That is all for the present. Get the other letters out at once. I'll ring when I want you.

Miss Pearson

Very well.

(She exits quickly)

Jack

(Pulling up a chair for her)

Now, what is it, dear? You look worried.

Margaret

It's about George.

Jack

(Relieved)

Oh, George. Well?

Margaret

I decided to drive into town early this morning to get some extra favors for the New Year's party this evening. First, I stopped in to see your mother a minute.

Jack

How is she?

Margaret

Fine. She says that Charlie goes back to college tomorrow. He's coming in today to tell you to stop that allowance—says he can make his own way. Isn't that just like him?

Jack

Pretty independent for a kid brother. But that's all right—any young fellow can make his way—does him good—

Margaret

But it's about George I want to speak. I stopped at his home and found Rose all upset. She says George is going to resign his position today.

Jack

You mean—quit his job?

Margaret

Yes.

Jack

Well, he knows how to do that.

Margaret

But Rose says he mustn't. She says it's as good pay as he can get and that is probably true.

Jack

Yes.

Margaret

But she says George doesn't like the work and feels he ought to be getting into something different.

Jack

As usual.

Margaret

Now, Jack, you mustn't be unsympathetic. Think of his wife and his little family. George has settled down—you know he has—and he is really serious about life. It doesn't seem as though people should suffer always for the thoughtlessness of their youth.

Jack

But they **always do,** my dear. I'm not unsympathetic, Margaret, but I can't see that I can do anything. You wouldn't have me hunt up George and force advice upon him.

Margaret

No, but—

Jack

I did that once, just once—at your request. Let me see, that was fifteen—eighteen, twenty—

(With sudden interest as he realizes it is twenty years)

Yes, twenty years ago this very day!

Margaret

Listen, Jack. Rose says George is coming to YOU for advice.

Jack

(Surprised)

Coming to me? Are you sure?

Margaret

That is what she said.

Jack

Today?

Margaret

Yes, this morning—he's not working today.

Jack

Well, that's a good one! Twenty years to a day! He's thirty-nine or forty and I am forty-one; well, well,—

Margaret

(Not understanding)

What do you mean by "twenty years to a day"?

Jack

I'll explain this evening, dear. I'll do anything I can for him.

Margaret

Thank you. Father and mother will appreciate it, and so will I.

(Starts for door L.)

Now I must go. Come home as early as you can.

(Hears someone at door L.)

There's someone, now. I'll slip out this way.

(Throws him a kiss and exits quickly R.)

(Door L. opens and office boy enters)

Boy

Mr. George Rowell to see you.

Jack

Show him in.

(As boy starts to go)

Just a minute—see that I have no interruption.

(Boy exits. In a moment George enters. He looks older and very much more settled. We see him serious for the first time)

Jack

(Rising and greeting him cordially)

Glad to see you, George.

George

Thank you.

Jack

(Offering him a chair)

Make yourself comfortable.

George

I know you're busy today and want to get away from the office as early as possible.

Jack

Glad for an excuse to forget the business. Well, what's on your mind?

George

I'll tell you frankly, I'm sort of up against it for some good advice. I've been steering clear of you because—well, pride, I suppose—you being my brother-in-law. I told my story to a couple of the fellows about town who are getting on and seem contented and all O. K. and they both asked: "What does Jack Butler say about it?" Jim Davis couldn't believe I'd passed you by—said you'd given him the tip that set him four-square with the world. I don't mind telling you—he says you've done as much or more than any man he knows to show the possibilities that are open to the working man who makes the most of himself.

Jack

Don't take Jim too seriously.

George

I've taken him just seriously enough to swallow my foolish pride and ask you to consider my case.

Jack

Why, you've been getting on very well, from all appearances.

George

Not getting ahead much, but I've been able to take care of my family. It's quite a pull to do that, though.

Jack

Eats into the money, all right.

George

Well, it's like this: I've been at that job for Rogers and Co. a year now, and I've got to have a change.

Jack

Why?

George

Why? My stars, man! It gets on my nerves as bad as that store job did.

Jack

Gets on your nerves? What do you mean?

George

I don't mind work, and plenty of it—I've got way beyond that. But did you ever spend eight or ten hours a day for six days in the week doing something you positively HATED to do?

Jack

Yes, when my father took me out of school, twenty-three years ago. That's the reason I went to night school. Then I began to make a peculiar discovery: That the trouble was with me and not with my job.

George

I know there is something wrong with my job. Every day I almost count the minutes until closing time.

Jack

So yours is the tragedy of watching the clock?

George

It sure is. And, take it from me, it's some tragedy when you wake up to it every morning of your life except Sunday.

Jack

You're right.

George

There's something wrong, all right. You don't feel that way about your work, do you?

Jack

No; because I'm doing work that interests me—the work that I like. It's a good part of my life. I'd rather do it than not.

George

(Rising) (Eagerly)

There, that's what I want to be able to say.

Jack

I wish that you could, George.

George

(Determined)

That's what I'm going to say. I'm going to resign at Rogers and Co.

Jack

What are you fitted for?

George

Well, I've done a lot of different things in the last twenty years.

Jack

What do you do as well or better than any other man does?

George

(Hesitatingly)

Why, I—don't know as there's anything special, but—

Jack

There you are!

George

Yes, there I am, but that is no sign that I'm going to stay there. I like the out-of-doors. I think I'd like to be an engineer of some kind.

Jack

(Decisively)

Twenty years too late.

George

How much preparation does that require?

Jack

Six, eight, ten years.

George

Well, let's see—I'm only just turned forty,—

Jack

What would your family do while you stopped and prepared?

George

(Sits down—taken aback)

That's right. Of course I couldn't do that. **I'm tied down.** Not that I don't love my family, understand—but it does seem too bad right now when I want to get a start—

(Speaking almost before he thinks)

There's father!

(Dismissing the thought)

No, I've too much manhood to take it from him NOW—he needs what he has for himself and mother. *How about night school? Or a correspondence course? Do they get a fellow anywhere in a life-time?

Jack

Too slow for you NOW, when it comes to engineering. Are you sure you would like engineering?

George

Oh, I don't know. All I know is that I'm just turned forty, and I spend three-fourths of my waking hours at work and that's as many as sixty hours a week and nearly 240 hours a month and over—let me see—over one thousand hours a year. And if I live twenty years longer that will be over 20,000 hours I'll put in at **something,** for I guess I'll never get through with working. Can't you see, **I want to find my place in this world before it's too late?** I'm in dead earnest. This is the last day of the year. Can't you help me to start the New Year with a brighter prospect?

Jack

(Impressed with George's seriousness)

George, I'd give a good deal if I were sure I could help you. This is genuine, and it's mighty serious. If you had only realized this thing twenty years ago today!

George

Why twenty years ago today?

Jack

When I cornered you at that New Year's party; don't you remember?

George

Sure enough! And you said—yes, you said something about coming to you in twenty years and we'd see how we'd stack up.

Jack

I did.

**Indicates change in lines to be made in towns which have no night schools.*

**Note: Leave out "night school? Or a" and change "course" to courses.

George

By Jiminy! If I'd thought of that I'd never have come with my little story.

Jack

Why not?

George

Well, a fellow has some pride.

Jack

(After a pause, during which he looks thoughtfully at George)

Well, George, are you through?

George

(With a sigh)

I guess so. You see what I'm up against.

Jack

(Rising)

When a fellow spends twenty or more years in living and accomplishes just what he set about to accomplish, we feel like congratulating him, do we not?

George

(Emphatically)

We surely do.

Jack

In that case, perhaps it is in order for me to congratulate you.

(He extends his hand)

George

(Greatly surprised)

Me?

Jack

Yes, you—you are in exactly the place you selected for yourself years ago. Recognize that it is **your choice** that is at the bottom of the whole thing.

(More kindly, as he observes that George winces under the truth)

I don't want to be hard on you, but I'll wager you are ready to admit that you are up against it at forty, because you wouldn't take time to think seriously at twenty. You see now that it is the level-headed fellow who makes the generous preparation for the big struggle for livelihood, position, happiness.

George

(Quietly)

Yes, I see it all, now. But what good is that going to do me to-day?

(Slowly)

I can't go back—

Jack

(Quickly)

I know. Let's get down to brass tacks. How many different jobs have you had in twenty years?

George

Land! I don't know! Eight or ten.

Jack

(Thoughtfully)

An average of two and a half years in each place.

(Turning suddenly on George)

Why did you change so often?

George

Didn't like the jobs.

Jack

I suppose there was something wrong with your job every time?

George

Well I don't know. That was the reason I always gave.

Jack

But now you're forty and ready to put the blame where it belongs. The jobs were all right—there was something wrong with you. Not well prepared were you? How much vision, how much enthusiasm did you put into your work, eh?

George

(Squirming under the fire)

Fire ahead! I'm here for the truth.

Jack

(Not unkindly)

All right. George, you are a likeable fellow, well-meaning, capable, even talented, but with it all you are a very good example of one of the most detestable parasites of the modern business world—a quitter.

George

(Surprised)

A quitter?

Jack

A quitter. You had every chance for an education—you were a quitter. And that's exactly what you've been to every decent job you've held in the last twenty years. You were content to start in life with practically no education. Then, because the men who are equipped pass you in the race, you grow discontented. Well, you may as well swallow your discontent and realize that the chances are ten to one that you'll never catch up with those fellows. Sounds hard, but you are out for the truth this morning. The men in the forties to-day are reaping the fruits of their twenties. We most certainly suffer for our lost opportunities, our wasted years—every one of us does. That's what you are up against now.

George

(With a sigh)

That's right. I'M TOO LATE! If I only knew just what I ought to be doing now!

Jack

The same old story. Your best chance now lies in the job you're holding. Your self-respect demands that you stay with it. Forget past failures, do your best and you'll get on as you never have before.

George

Perhaps so.

Jack

I feel your days of experimenting are past. You have a wife and three children and very little money saved up. It's your first business to be sure that the money to take care of them comes in each month.

George

Of course.

Jack

Let's see! Allen is how old?

George

Fourteen in May.

Jack

You mustn't jeopardize your children's future.

George

(Eagerly as he rises)

Those children are going to have a thorough education. They are going to be made to think seriously about their To-Morrows. Sometimes Allen gets pretty tired of the grind of studying but he is going

(He grows very earnest)

through high school and college if I have to take him there myself and sit—

(Suddenly he stops and paces the floor)

Jack

If you have to what?

George

Oh, never mind. I was just thinking.

(Resentfully)

I can't see why my father gave in to me when I wanted to stop school, that's all. It wasn't right. I can't forgive him. He knew I didn't realize. Here's the result.

Jack

You with your job you don't like are no worse off than hundreds of other misfits in this world—men who trudge on and watch the clock every day because it brings in the money that cares for the wife—the money that is going to make it possible for the little ones at home to find for themselves broader, happier lives.

George

(Quickly)

If they have the good sense to do so. Well, I'm willing to make any sacrifice for Rose and Allen and the babies.

(Forcefully)

My children are going to profit by my mistakes.

(With pride)

Allen is a fine little chap—bright enough, I'll tell you. I'll put him through school and college, if it takes my last penny.

(George turns aside in an attitude of deep thought)

Jack

Fathers can help or hinder, but remember, every boy holds his destiny in his own hands. You would not accept the advice of your father.

George

(Walking toward Jack and speaking earnestly)

Yes, that's so, but I'm going to reach my boy as my father never reached me. I've just been thinking, Jack, that I have a new job after all, and I'm going to begin it with a leave of absence for a week and take Allen out in the woods for a camping trip. We'll camp and fish together and I'll have a good opportunity to talk things over with him and show him why he should avoid the mistakes I've made. I'll do it in a way that he can't help listen to—and I'll stick to my work and make good in it.

Jack
(Shaking hands with George)
That's the right idea, George, and a good plan. Now you **have** cut out a **real** job for yourself.

CURTAIN

EPILOGUE

(To be spoken deliberately and impressively in front of the curtain about five seconds following the final curtain, and before the lights are turned on, by someone with a good voice—perhaps the president of the club, the chairman of the committee, or the director of the play.

And so with John Butler's counsel and encouragement George Rowell took a new grip on life, devoted himself to making a success of his work, and by attention to duty in a spirit of whole-hearted service won advancement to a better and more congenial position.

As for his boy, George by patient determination and unflagging efforts secured his confidence and enthusiastic cooperation, and now in another year Allen will graduate from the university a full-fledged civil engineer.

George came to a realization of his mistakes too late to repair the damage done himself, but yet in time to aid his boy safely through his critical high school period.

He frequently feels a poignant regret over his lost opportunities, but is deeply thankful that he found the way to help his boy onto the path that leads to worth-while accomplishment and success.

And now, boys of_____, the Rotary club, with a desire to inspire you to make the most out of your lives, has brought you this play and now gives you this message—

Life calls you ever to a quest,
To work, to strive with steady nerve,
To help, to sacrifice, to serve;
Life calls—and it must have your best.

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